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See, If You Can

Ruby Rahman

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SEE, IF YOU CAN

Leave him. Just see what he can do.
He has no hearth or home, no common sense. Don't marry him,
could he support a family?
If you can, test him a little—to see what he'll do.
Put an expired check in his hand,
and surely he'll buy for you
a yellow mustard field like a square handkerchief,
a dancing river.
He's quite dutiful, don't you believe—
that morning I see him with a cart full of fallen leaves
going to the vegetable market.
Mixing the green of lettuce with the tomatoes' red,
he'll put an easel of Quayyum into the housewife's hand,
and you'll accept it, you'll definitely accept it.
If, in the rooms of your flat, you want
a few gardens full of butterflies
or the glow of a field of fireflies,
he'll bring them just like that.

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Once in a while, pluck two or three mornings
from eternity for him,
keep a slice of moon on the blue saucer
next to the plate of rice.
Right next to poverty, put all the cuckoos of spring.
If you can give without questioning, then
give him some concessions,
keep him out of a calculated, brief marriage.
Searching through *glasnost*, he might bring you
the natural society of man.
Give him a more elaborate marriage, make a few concessions;
make a way for him towards beauty.

Note: Quayyum Chowdhury is a renowned painter of Bangladesh, known for his use of bright colors.

RUBY RAHMAN

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Ruby Rahman, born in 1946 in Dhaka, received her BA and MA degrees with Honors in Bengali, English, and Psychology from Dhaka University, and for many years taught English at a commercial college in Dhaka. She has served on the Bangladesh national review board for textbooks and educational curricula, organized national poetry festivals, and produced and appeared in literary programs on radio and television while raising her family and traveling with her husband, Nurul Islam, a politician and leader of the Bangladesh movement for workers' rights. She has published several books of poetry and is among the most highly regarded poets active in Bangladesh today. Since 2004, she has been an editor for *Kali o Kalam*, a weekly literary magazine published in Dhaka. In English translation by Carolyn Wright and Syed Manzoorul Islam, her poems have appeared in *Chelsea*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Poetry*, and in an anthology of Bengali women's poetry translated and edited by Wright, *Majestic Nights: Love Poems of Bengali Women* (White Pine Press, 2008).

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In 2008 Ruby Rahman spent several months in Iowa City as a fellow of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. In early December 2008, while visiting her daughter in Boston shortly before returning to Bangladesh, she received the horrific news that her husband and son had been killed in a mysterious "accidental" fire in the family's Dhaka apartment. Subsequent investigations have pointed to arson staged by political opponents or possibly Islamic militants; Nurul Islam had planned to run as a candidate for national parliamentary elections but had received telephoned death threats in the days before the fire. With her daughter, Ruby immediately returned to Bangladesh, and has since taken up her husband's work as a Member of the Bangladesh Parliament. When her public service duties permit, she plans to return to the U.S. to visit her daughter and give readings of her work.

For more from Carolyn Wright on translating Rahman's poetry, visit www.iowareview.org.